

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5185

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

USLO PEKING

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 2132

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SN, UR

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE FOREIGN MINISTER'S TALKS WITH GROMYKO

REF: SINGAPORE 1880 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH GROMYKO AND OTHER SENIOR SOVIET OFFICIALS, SINGAPORE FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM WAS TOLD THAT THE USSR WOULD CONTINUE TO FOLLOW A POLICY OF DETENTE DESPITE CRITICISMS BY "REACTIONARY ELEMENTS" IN THE US. GROMYKO SAID THAT SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS WERE WORSENING AND CALLED ON THE SMALLER NATIONS OF THE WORLD (E.G. SINGAPORE) TO SPEAK OUT AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE AGAINST PRC POLICY LINES WHICH THREATENED WORLD PEACE REGARDLESS OF NON- ALIGNED SOLIDARITY. THE SOVIETS
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EXPRESSED SUSPICION OF ASEAN BASED ON ASSISTANCE

RENDERED BY THAILAND, THE PHILIPPINES, AND INDONESIA TO THE US DURING THE VIET-NAM WAR, AND WHILE THEY LATER IN TALKS INDICATED THAT THEIR SUSPICION WAS LINKED WITH HANOI'S RESERVATIONS, ALSO MADE IT PLAIN THAT THEIR CRITICISMS WERE BASED ON THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT JUDGMENTS. TO THE EXTENT THAT ASEAN FOCUSED ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THEY FOUND IT ACCEPTABLE, HOWEVER. GROMYKO BROUGHT UP THE SUBJECT OF ASIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY BUT DID NOT PRESS IT. ON SINGAPORE-SOVIET BILATERALS, TRADE MATTERS WERE DISCUSSED, AND RAJARATNAM INFORMED THE SOVIETS OF PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW'S IMPENDING VISIT TO CHINA (A FACT WHICH THE SOVIETS EVIDENTLY ALREADY KNEW). END SUMMARY.

1. I MET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM APRIL 27, AND AFTER DISCUSSING LAW OF THE SEA MATTERS WITH HIM TURNED THE CONVERSATION TO HIS RECENT VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION. IN PARTICULAR, I EXPRESSED CURIOSITY REGARDING HIS TALKS IN MOSCOW WITH SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO. RAJARATNAM WAS QUITE FORTHCOMING AND GAVE ME THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH GROMYKO AND OTHER SENIOR SOVIET OFFICIALS (FIRYUBIN TOOK PART IN THE FORMAL TALKS ATTENDED BY GROMYKO, AND NEMCHINA APPARENTLY ENGAGED IN SEPARATE DISCUSSIONS WITH RAJARATNAM OUTSIDE THE CONTEXT OF THE FORMAL TALKS).

2. RAJARATNAM HAD VERY LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT SINGAPORE-SOVIET BILATERALS. HE NOTED THAT THE ONLY REAL TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION INVOLVED TRADE MATTERS, WHICH HE DISMISSED AS BEING NOT VERY IMPORTANT. HE DID, HOWEVER, DESCRIBE THE STATE OF SINGAPORE-SOVIET RELATIONS AS GENERALLY GOOD AND WITH NO PARTICULAR PROBLEMS. DURING THE TALKS WITH GROMYKO, RAJARATNAM LET IT BE KNOWN THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE WOULD BE VISITING THE PRC, A PIECE OF NEWS WHICH ACCORDING TO RAJARATNAM THE SOVIETS ACCEPTED IMPASSIVELY. RAJARATNAM INFERRED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE ALREADY AWARE OF PM LEE'S CHINA TRIP, PROBABLY HAVING GAINED THIS INFORMATION IN PEKING. RAJARATNAM MENTIONED A REPORT THAT THE CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD BEEN TELLING FOREIGN DIPLOMATS ABOUT THE TRIP WELL BEFORE THE NEWS

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BECAME PUBLIC.

3. RAJARATNAM STATED THAT IN HIS DISCUSSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS WITH THE SOVIETS, THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION WAS ON THREE MAIN TOPICS: DETENTE, SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS, AND ASEAN. WITH RESPECT TO DETENTE, GROMYKO HAD TAKEN THE LINE THAT SOVIET POLICY REMAINED FIRMLY DIRECTED TOWARD THE ACHIEVEMENT OF DETENTE, AND WHILE THERE WERE

SOME "REACTIONARY ELEMENTS" IN THE US WHO WERE CRITICAL OF THE CONCEPT, IT NEVERTHELESS REMAINED A NECESSARY INGREDIENT IN WORLD AFFAIRS. RAJARATNAM SAID THAT HE HAD AGREED; INDEED, AS A SMALL NATION SINGAPORE COULD SURVIVE ONLY IF INTERNATIONAL AMITY WAS MAINTAINED.

4. RAJARATNAM RECALLED THAT BREZHNEV'S NAME WAS MENTIONED A GREAT DEAL BY GROMYKO IN CONNECTION WITH DETENTE, AND BREZHNEV'S SPEECH AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH CPSU WAS ALSO REPEATEDLY CITED. RAJARATNAM JOKINGLY REMARKED THAT HE GOT THE IMPRESSION BREZHNEV HAD NOW BEEN ELEVATED BY THE SOVIETS TO THE STATUS OF AN ORACLE, AND THE BREZHNEV SPEECH WAS REGARDED BY THEM AS SOME KIND OF AN ENCYCLICAL WITH WHICH HE, RAJARATNAM, SHOULD HAVE BEEN FAMILIAR AS A MATTER OF COURSE. IN FACT, HE HAD ONLY GLANCED OVER THE SPEECH, BUT IN ORDER TO KEEP FROM LOSING FACE HAD SAID TO GROMYKO THAT HE HAD READ IT. BECAUSE OF THE ATTENTION GIVEN TO IT BY THE SOVIETS, HE PLANNED TO STUDY IT MORE CAREFULLY.

5. RAJARATNAM REMARKED THAT THE SUBJECT OF SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS WAS THE TOPIC WHICH REALLY CAUSED THE SOVIETS TO SIT UP IN THEIR CHAIRS AND "WIDEN THEIR EYES." GROMYKO WAS VERY BITTER IN HIS DENUNCIATION OF THE CHINESE, ESPECIALLY ON THE SCORE OF THREATENING WORLD PEACE, AND DESCRIBED SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS AS "WORSENING." RAJARATNAM NOTED THAT THE SOVIET POSITION WITH RESPECT TO CHINA AND THE NON-ALIGNED WORLD HAD BECOME SOMEWHAT SIMILAR TO THE US POSITION ON NEUTRALITY UNDER DULLES: THE SMALLER NATIONS OF THE WORLD (E.G. SINGAPORE), DESPITE THEIR SIZE, SHOULD SPEAK OUT AGAINST CHINA AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE WHEN THE PRC ADOPTED POLICY LINES DETRIMENTAL TO WORLD PEACE, AND NOT ALLOW SOLIDARITY

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WITH THE NON-ALIGNED WORLD TO GET IN THE WAY.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 2132

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

RAJARATNAM SAID THAT HE HIMSELF HAD TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN RAISING THE QUESTION OF ASEAN, ASKING GROMYKO TO OUTLINE THE SOVIET POSITION WITH RESPECT TO THE ORGANIZATION AND EXPLAINING BEFOREHAND THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE MEMBER STATES OF ASEAN ATTACHED TO IT IN TERMS OF ACHIEVING REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROWTH AND CONSEQUENT POLITICAL AND SOCIAL STABILITY. GROMYKO HAD TAKEN THE LINE THAT IF ASEAN'S OBJECTIVES WERE OF THIS ORDER, THEN THE ORGANIZATION WAS ACCEPTABLE. NEVERTHELESS, HE DEFINED THE SOVIET POSITION AS BEING OPPOSED TO BLOCS OF ANY SORT. HE ALSO REFERRED TO THE ASSISTANCE RENDERED BY CERTAIN ASEAN COUNTRIES TO THE US DURING THE VIET-NAM WAR. SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA WERE NOT TO BE INCLUDED IN THIS CATEGORY BUT THE PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND HAD ASSISTED IN THE US WAR EFFORT, AS HAD INDONESIA VIA
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CLANDESTINE ASSISTANCE TO THE US IN ITS INTERVENTION IN CAMBODIA. THESE ACTIONS IN THE PAST RAISED DOUBTS REGARDING ASEAN'S PURPOSES AND SUGGESTED THAT IT MIGHT BE A NEW SUBSTITUTE FOR SEATO.

7. RAJARATNAM DECLARED THAT HE HAD EMPHATICALLY DENIED ANY MILITARY CONNOTATIONS OF ASEAN, AND REFERRED TO THE BALI DECLARATION AND STATEMENT BY THE ASEAN FOREIGN

MINISTERS FOLLOWING THE KUALA LUMPUR MEETING AS EVIDENCE OF THE ORGANIZATIONS'S FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. HE HAD FOUND IT INTERESTING THAT IN EXPRESSING SOVIET CRITICISM OF ASEAN, GROMYKO HAD INITIALLY INDICATED THAT THEIR CRITICISMS WERE BASED ON THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT JUDGMENTS AND NOT OUT OF ANY DEFERENCE TO HANOI; HOWEVER, AS THE GIVE AND TAKE OVER ASEAN CONTINUED, GROMYKO HAD INCREASINGLY REFERRED TO HANOI'S RESERVATIONS AND SUSPICIONS OF THE US TIES MAINTAINED BY THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES. EVENTUALLY GROMYKO HAD COMMENTED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE NOT NECESSARILY OPPOSED TO ASEAN PROVIDED THAT IT ADHERED TO THE CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS ITS RAISON D'ETRE. RAJARATNAM COMMENTED AT THIS POINT THAT HE FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE SOVIETS HAD IN EFFECT TAKEN SUCH A NEGATIVE STAND AGAINST ASEAN AT THIS STAGE IN THE ORGANIZATION'S EVOLUTION, SINCE THE FIVE MEMBER NATIONS ALL WERE STRONG SUPPORTERS OF ASEAN. WHY HADN'T THE SOVIETS TAKEN A LESS NEGATIVE VIEW, AND KEPT THEIR OPTIONS OPEN?

8. RAJARATNAM MENTIONED THAT IN A CONVERSTATION WITH NEMCHINA (AS NOTED ABOVE APPARENTLY OUTSIDE THE CONTEXT OF THE RAJARATNAM-GROMYKO TALKS), NEMCHINA HAD CRITICIZED THE ASEAN NATIONS FOR "ATTACKING" HANOI. RAJARATNAM SAID HE TOLD NEMCHINA THAT THESE SO-CALLED ATTACKS WERE ALL IN RESPONSE TO HANOI'S OWN DENUCIATIONS IN NHAN DAN OF ASEAN, AND ITS EXPRESSED DETERMINATION TO SUPPORT REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN THE ASEAN COUNTRIES. IT WOULD HAVE CREATED A VERY BAD IMPRESSION OF ASEAN STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY IF HANOI'S DENUNCIATIONS HAD BEEN LEFT UNANSWERED. WHEN NEMCHINA HAD TRIED TO DRAW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT AND NHAN DAN AS THE ORGAN OF THE LAO DONG PARTY, CONFIDENTIAL

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RAJARATNAM HAD RETORTED THAT THE ASEAN COUNTRIES REGARDED THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT IN NORTH VIET-NAM AS BEING ONE AND THE SAME.

9. RAJARATNAM REPORTED THAT THE SUBJECT OF ASIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY HAD COME UP BRIEFLY IN HIS TALKS WITH GROMYKO, WHO TOOK THE POSITION THAT THE CONCEPT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO THE ASIAN NATIONS BY REDUCING TENSIONS. HOWEVER, THERE WAS RECOGNITION ON THE SOVIET PART THAT NOT EVERY ASIAN NATION FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE ADVANTAGES OF ASIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY, AND THE SOVIETS WERE NOT TRYING TO PUSH IT UPON THEM. GROMYKO SAID THAT ANY ASIAN NATION COULD JOIN, INCLUDING CHINA. RAJARATNAM NEVERTHELESS STILL REGARDED THE MEASURES AS BEING A SOVIET EFFORT TO ISOLATE CHINA.

10. ACCORDING TO RAJARATNAM THE FOREGOING COVERSACTIONS WERE THE ONLY SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS IN WHICH HE HAD ENGAGED DURING HIS VISIT TO THE USSR. EVERYTHING ELSE WAS JUST SIGHTSEEING. HE FELT IT WAS QUITE CLEAR THAT THE SOVIETS WERE GOING THROUGH THE PROPER MOTIONS IN RECEIVING HIM TO SHOW A FRIENDLY ATTITUDE TOWARD SINGAPORE, BUT WOULD HAVE PREFERRED A VISIT BY THE SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER RATHER THAN THE SINGAPORE FOREIGN MINISTER.

11. COMMENT: IN MY JUDGMENT, RAJARATNAM'S TALKS WITH GROMYKO AND OTHER SOVIET LEADERS PROBABLY BROKE LITTLE NEW GROUND. THE VISIT WAS INTENDED PRIMARILY TO GIVE THE SOVIETS ADVANCE NOTICE OF LEE'S FORTHCOMING VISIT TO CHINA AND TO REASSURE THE USSR THAT THE GOS IS STILL INTERESTED IN MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION DESPITE LEE'S TRIP TO PEKING. IN SHORT, IT WAS A BALANCING ACT, AND ACCEPTED AS SUCH. ONLY IN THE QUESTION OF TRADE IS IT POSSIBLE THAT SOME NEW DEVELOPMENTS MIGHT EMERGE IN SINGAPORE-SOVIET RELATIONS. UPON HIS RETURN TO SINGAPORE FROM THE USSR RAJARATNAM SAID PUBLICLY THAT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SOVIETS WERE UNDER WAY ON ONE OR TWO PROJECTS WHICH MIGHT "TAKE OFF" (REFTEL), AND HIS PASSING OVER THIS SUBJECT LIGHTLY IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH ME SUGGESTS THAT SOMETHING IS PROBABLY STIRRING. (DCM GRANT RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE TWO CONFIDENTIAL

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PROJECTS IN A RECENT COVERSACTION WITH SOVIET DCM SEMENENKO AND WAS TOLD THAT THE DISCUSSIONS HAD SO FAR BEEN VERY "VAGUE" AND IT WOULD BE SOME TIME BEFORE RESULTS WERE ATTAINED- MORE DISSIMULATION?) AT ANY RATE, PRIME MINISTER LEE AND HIS COLLEAGUES CONSIDER THAT THEY HAVE THE ABILITY TO KEEP SOVIET TRADE ACTIVITIES IN SINGAPORE UNDER THEIR CONTROL, AND THAT BY OFFERING THE SOVIETS CERTAIN COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES HERE THEY ARE IN A BETTER POSITION TO HOLD THE USSR AT ARM'S LENGTH ON MORE SENSITIVE POLITICAL ISSUES. HOLDRIDGE

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